

COLLECTIONS OVERVIEWS

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

I. SCOPE

This overview focuses on Library of Congress holdings of material by and about the United Nations, its related agencies, and other international intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) such as the European Union, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Organization of American States, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, and the African Union. Intergovernmental organizations are bodies to which governments belong and send representatives. Typically, a country joins an intergovernmental organization by treaty or other agreement.

II. SIZE

The Library collects from most international intergovernmental organizations except for smaller technical international agencies in the agricultural or medical fields, which might be of more interest to the National Agricultural or Medical Libraries. Because international agencies deal with a vast array of subjects, works by and about the organizations are found across the Library's classification schedule and are located throughout the general and special collections. The Serial and Government Publications Division permanently houses the full set of U.N. masthead documents in hard copy and microform, and holds unbound copies of the symbol document sets and serial publications of many other organizations. Bound sets of the latter are transferred to the general collections. Many publications of international intergovernmental organizations are found in the Law Library.

Because of the varied subjects covered by international organizations, it is difficult to provide a count of all IGO publications and documents at the Library of Congress. However, it has been estimated that the United Nations alone produces approximately 10,000 printed publications or documents yearly; the size of the overall international collections can be extrapolated from this. As an example, the largest subset of U.N. materials is the collected set of U.N. documents, classified as JX1977.A2. While LC has not added to this bound collection since the mid-1970's, preferring now to collect in microform, this one printed set extends to more than 500 linear feet.

III. GENERAL RESEARCH STRENGTHS

The consistency with which the Library has acquired documents and publications of intergovernmental organizations together with substantive numbers of secondary

resources makes the collections a strong resource for the study of the history and functions of such organizations themselves. Within the collections may be found charters, other founding documents, membership directories, annual reports, yearbooks, rules of procedure, proceedings of meetings, decisions, recommendations, standards, and other documents reflecting the purposes, evolution, and activities of the organizations. Together with the Library's large collections of U.S. and foreign government publications, materials published by international organizations also form a basis for the study of the relationships the United States and other countries have with these organizations, international relations, and international law. The range of statistical works from intergovernmental organizations provide normalized comparative data often not found elsewhere in fields such as demography, health, economics, and trade. In general, the Library's collections of materials from international organizations support comparative studies in many subject areas as a result of the varied activities of these organizations.

IV. AREAS OF DISTINCTION

The Library collects and has collected from almost all international intergovernmental organizations. The resulting size, breadth and historical depth of its combined international organizations collections constitute an area of distinction.

The Library's collections of United Nations materials are especially noteworthy, including United Nations masthead documents, official records, and publications of all sorts, dating from the formation of the United Nations in 1945. In addition to serving as a United Nations depository library, the Library collects through separate deposit, exchange or gift arrangements with many United Nations sub-agencies, which are not part of the basic U.N. depository program. For example, the Library of Congress receives documents from all five regional economic commissions, whereas most other U.S. depositories receive the publications of only one commission, usually the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. The collection from the Economic Commission for Africa is particularly strong (possibly better than the collection at the U.N. Dag Hammarskjöld Library) because of the acquisitions efforts of the Library's Nairobi Office. Serial and Government Publications Division has a strong collection of reference works by and about the United Nations and related agencies. The Rare Book and Special Collections Division houses several versions of the 1945 United Nations charter, and the Geography and Map Division collects United Nations maps.

Also strong are the Library's holdings of publications and documents from the United Nations specialized agencies, organizations related to the United Nations by agreement, but with their own governing bodies, programs, and publications. These collections include publications of the International Labor Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Health Organization, World Bank Group, International Monetary Fund, International Civil Aviation Organization, International Telecommunication Union, Universal Postal Union, World Meteorological Organization, World Intellectual

Property Organization, International Fund for Agricultural Development, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, and World Tourism Organization. Some of these collections are larger than others, depending on their relevance to the Library's subject collecting policies.

Publications of the European Union constitute another major collection. Staff in Serial and Government Publications Division, Humanities and Social Sciences Division, Law Library, and European Division routinely deal with E.U. materials.

The previous paragraphs are merely illustrative of the many fine collections of publications by and about international organizations at the Library of Congress.

V. ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

Traditionally access to document sets of intergovernmental organizations was difficult. Often lacking other tools, the Library had to rely on sales catalogs from a given organization to identify publications or to find a document number. All of this has changed with the development of the world wide web. Today most intergovernmental organizations have websites that offer free online full text of their working documents and often full text of some of their important publications, such as annual reports. Further, many offer either free or subscribed online indexes and statistical databases. A glance at the list of *Databases and E-Resources at the Library of Congress* provides an idea of the availability of electronic resources, such as *UN Comtrade* (subscribed), *FAOSTAT* (free), and *ILOLEX* (free).

While the United Nations had one of the better organized indexing systems in the pre-electronic era, indexing of publications prior to 1950 was sketchy. Today, *AccessUN*, a commercial product provides indexing back to 1946 with links to existing full-text. The United Nations' own *Official Documents System (ODS)* is available free online and offers full-text of the documents of major U.N. organs in U.N. official languages as far back as 1993. *SourceOECD* offers desktop access to electronic text of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development studies and reports, as well as several statistical databases.

Also many libraries have started to digitize important publications of international intergovernmental organizations. Major examples include the *League of Nations Statistical and Disarmament Documents*, hosted by Northwestern University, and the *GATT Digital Library*, a cooperative project of Stanford University Libraries, the World Trade Organization, and Academic Information Resources.

These electronic resources complement and have greatly improved access to the Library's collections of materials published by and about international intergovernmental organizations. Of course, in some instances, they raise new issues about archiving and permanent access.

VI. WEAKNESSES/EXCLUSIONS

The Library has never had detailed records, such as a shelflist, of individual U.N. documents or the documents of related agencies, and the Library has never done systematic claiming for missing items. Likewise, the Library has not consistently claimed missing periodical issues of international intergovernmental organizations. For example, when the statistical publications of the European Union were excluded from deposit arrangements and became paid subscriptions over a decade ago, the Library did not follow up quickly enough to avoid gaps in statistical serial holdings. This is not as much a problem since the European Union's *Eurostat* database became freely available on its *Europa* web site in 2004.

Another major gap at the Library is its lack of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade documents. While the Library has substantial holdings of other GATT publications, these were not acquired in print because of concern about restriction and the timing of de-restriction. The Library later did not acquire an available microform set. GATT documents are used in compiling legislative histories of various versions of the trade agreement and have been requested during periods when the agreement was being re-negotiated. The lack of these tangible publications has been ameliorated by the *GATT Digital Library* mentioned in the previous section.

Although the Library has an excellent collection of League of Nations publications, use is difficult because the materials are boxed, not shelved, at their remote site at Landover. The microform League collection, available for use through the Microform Reading Room, is a good backup but unfortunately does not contain the full range of League materials removed from Capitol Hill. Second sets of many of some of the more important League publications with subject related call numbers were kept on campus, but many of the second set call numbers show up only in the printed catalog.

A problem, though not necessarily a weakness, is the growing number of official international agency publications outsourced to commercial publishers. These then do not come in through deposit, staff must recommend acquisition, and often the materials must be purchased.

Finally, traditional cataloging rules do not work well for large documentary collections. Access to the UN collections and other international agency materials can often be very difficult because of cataloging practices that separate sets of official documents that the agencies themselves and scholars in the field regard as units.